

Continued Support for New Special Educators

Induction/Mentoring

Research indicates that 40% of special education teachers leave the field before their fifth year of teaching and that teachers who enter the profession through an alternative certification route are at the greatest risk of leaving. Beginning special education teachers face many of the same challenges as beginning general educators; however, they also face some unique challenges. Teachers new to the field of special education often feel unprepared to handle the demands of teaching, managing paperwork, conducting evaluations, managing student behavior, working with parents, and collaborating with other teachers. Building induction and mentoring programs that are effective is of critical importance toward the retention of new teachers. Whitaker (2000) found that beginning special education teachers who had mentors that were effective were more likely to remain in the field. The mentors had the following characteristics:

- ✓ They were special educators.
- ✓ They met with the new teacher frequently.
- ✓ They provided emotional support.
- ✓ They conveyed system information related to the teaching environments and to special education.
- ✓ They informed the new teacher of materials and resources.

Vermont regulations require that teachers with Level I licensure receive three years of support from a mentor before a Level II license will be issued. The primary goal of the Higher Education Council (HEC) Induction and Mentoring project is to build partnerships with local school districts to plan and design effective mentoring programs, professional development and growth opportunities, and other supports related to regional, district, and educator needs.

Participants

The Induction/Mentoring Program is open to any beginning special educator working in the field one-three years or any special educator new to the state of Vermont.

Design

Induction and Mentoring begins for participants in the HEC with the Internship course. Students work with HEC Supervisors as well as trained Field-Based Mentors to complete their Internship requirements. Mentors are special educators with at least three years of experience who also receive skill-building training in coaching, evidence collection, observation, decision-making, and the nature of true support.

Graduates and members of HEC cohorts continue to meet as cohort groups both formally and informally. The goal is to provide on-going professional development centered on identified training needs as well as an opportunity to continue to build collegiality and support with other new special educators in the region.

The HEC Mentoring coordinator also works with special education administrators and building principals to design effective mentoring and induction systems for all new special educators within the school or district or to evaluate existing mentoring and induction systems to ensure that the unique needs of the beginning special educator are being met.

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